

REMARKS

By

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of the

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Dr. Chang,

Mr. Buckley,

Ladies and gentlemen.

We gather in this spectacular setting to remember and pay tribute to the roots from which we grow. Ellis Island -- more than any symbol in America -- calls to mind our history as a nation of immigrants, of men women and children who gave up established ways of life to gamble on the possibilities of the New World.

From 1892 when the first immigration station was opened here in New York harbor until these facilities were padlocked in 1954, it is estimated that more than 12 million would-be

Americans passed through Ellis Island.

To many it was known the Isle of Hope. Others referred to it as the Isle of Tears, both for the rending separations that sometimes occurred here as well as for the tearful reunions that often took place on these few acres.

As you all know, the National Park Service in conjunction with the Statue of Liberty Foundation have been engaged in the magnificent work of restoring of the Great Hall to create what will be the Ellis Island National Monument. This Monument that we see behind us will be one of the lasting landmarks of the historical geography of our nation. I salute the National Park Service

and the Statue of Liberty Foundation for their vision and craftsmanship in creating a living museum that will keep future generations of Americans in touch with past ones.

The special reason for our visit here today is another set of roots that are imbedded deep in the soil of this island -- the roots of the United States Public Health Service.

This year marks the Centennial of an act signed by President Grover Cleveland "to establish the Commissioned Corps of the Marine Hospital Service." For almost a century prior to that date, the federal government had provided medical care to merchant seaman. This activity was strengthened in the 1870s by the formation of the Marine

Hospital Service, which brought uniforms, merit appointments and promotions, and career service with mobility to the marine hospital enterprise.

My predecessors of the period, however, foresaw the need for a broad-based Public Health Service. To accomplish this, they sought to have the reforms they had implemented written into law -- a goal achieved in 1889 by the passage of the Commissioned Corps Act that put the officers of the Marine Hospital Service on a footing with their counterparts in the Army and the Navy.

The Marine Hospital Service was thus poised to become involved in broader issues of health in America -- a step it took with the assignment of medical

officers to the new immigration facility on Ellis Island in 1892. Few in number at first, the staffing at Ellis Island grew steadily, reaching a high point when some 350 employees of what had been renamed the Public Health Service worked here in the years prior to World War I.

PHS work on Ellis Island was divided between "The Line", examining newly arrived immigrants; the staffing of the 650 beds in the two hospitals built for the care of sick arrivals; and boarding incoming ships to inspect cargos and crews.

Virtually every commissioned officer of that epoch served a tour on Ellis Island. Medical training took place in the hospitals. Graduates of Ellis

Island were assigned abroad to screen emigrants prior to departure. Pioneering work in mental hygiene and intelligence testing took place here, as did the development of techniques for the surgical treatment of trachoma that were later applied by the PHS throughout the American South.

Following World War I immigration policy became more restrictive and eventually the plane replaced the ship as the principal means of immigration. Although the PHS maintained the hospital facilities on the Island until 1951, the period of titanic immigration ended shortly after the First World War.

For the PHS, though, the reality

and the memory of Ellis Island remains alive today. It was here that our professional forbearers moved out of the marine hospitals and began a pattern of response to the health crises of the nation that remains the hallmark of the Public Health Service today. The PHS, in general, and the commissioned corps, in particular, has been responding to acute national needs ever since -- including the health care of Native Americans, the investigation of legionnaires' disease and toxic shock syndrome, the treatment of refugees, and battle against AIDS.

It was here that the medical officers of the PHS labored to bring science to bear on the human condition in a systematic

and equitable fashion. The first democracy that the immigrant was to experience in the New World was medical democracy at the hands of the Public Health Service on Ellis Island.

And it was here that the PHS made its presence known to the country as a whole -- a viability it has not abandoned since.

In several days, I will formally step down as your Surgeon General. As I do that, I take with me many fond memories of the people with whom I have worked over these past eight years and the goals we have reached together.

I also take with me the pride of having served this country and

all of its people. I share that pride with the men and women of the PHS of earlier years who staffed these buildings, who traversed this harbor many, many times, and who helped to build today's United States. I salute them and their work. And I salute the Public Health Service they helped build and that I have been privileged to serve.

Thank you.